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ABSTRACT

Recent guidelines for the preparation of English teachers make the assumption that preservice and inservice teacher education are contiguous parts of an ongoing process. Too often, however, inservice education involves isolated efforts that are perceived by teachers to have little direct relation to what actually happens in the classroom. In order to make preservice and inservice education contiguous and to make inservice education an integral part of teaching, preservice teacher candidates, teacher educators, and practicing teachers must learn from each other while focusing on the actual job of the teacher. Teacher educators should establish credibility with teachers by demonstrating their knowledge of classroom techniques. They should also work on developing relationships of mutual trust and respect in which they allow teachers to make meaningful decisions about the training of teacher candidates, spend time in teachers' classrooms, and give positive reinforcement for good teaching techniques they observe. Teachers and teacher educators should also remain open to the possibility of gaining teaching ideas from observing the work of teacher candidates. (GW)

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IT CAN BE DONE: BRINGING THE PRE'S AND THE IN'S CLOSER TOGETHER

A Paper Presented by:
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at the Conference on English Education
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In the first page of the preface of the new guidelines, the relationship between preservice and inservice preparation is presented as follows:

> This statement, like the guidelines before it, takes for granted that the education of teachers of English (or any field) is a continuing, lifelong process. No prospective teacher can attain, through an undergraduate teacher-training program or even a program leading to permanent certification, the qualifications we identify. Therefore, teachers should not consider their preparation ended when they receive their permanent certificates and tenure in their jobs. Some of the qualifications identified can be developed only through experience in teaching. Our statement, consequently, does not speak of preservice or inservice preparation; we assume that the two are contiguous parts of an ongoing process.

Too often such an idea has all the force of a platitude. It is very much like an oft-repeated creed in which we find comfort--not in its accuracy in describing our lives, but in its familiarity. It is just this familiarity which poses the greatest danger in these guidelines, for we are all certain that we are already doing an acceptable majority of these things and the few omissions and deviations are surely nothing but forgivable manifestations of our ultimate humanity.

Indeed, anyone who either claims or appears to be doing more is suspect. Such a person or program is bound to be perpetrating a fraud or, at best, being overly zealous. We may tolerate such behavior, but we dare not embrace it for fear of removing ourselves from the comfortable acceptance of being in the mainstream--or another way of putting it--in the mediocre majority.

Too often this platitudinous statement (that no prospective teacher

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can attain all these qualifications) provides comfort for those responsible for preservice programs. Anything that is not learned now will surely be learned later. And what of that later--the inservice preparation, the "ongoing process"?

Too often this platitudinous statement ("That the education of teachers of English (or any field) is a continuing, lifelong process") means the following to the practicing professional:

1. Oh yes, this Friday has been designated as an inservice day. We'll meet in the library to hear a guest speaker and then meet by departments.
2. We're working on curriculum development. During the next quarter every Thursday after school from 3:30 until 5:30 we'll be working on getting our curriculum written according to new State Department of Education guidelines.
3. Of course, I'll continue to learn and even actively do something about it, like going to summer school.

Unfortunately, these usual attempts at the continuing education of teachers make more sense to their designers than to the practicing professionals for whom they are ostensibly designed. Those infamous inservice days are usually the most observable product of some supervisor/coordinator/administrator and as such are designed to duly impress the superintendent with the coordinator's diligence in planning such an event.

Even the best intentioned of these undertakings are doomed, among other reasons, because the teachers are more concerned with how they could have better spent that day--recording grades, reading papers, preparing materials--and because these events are, by their very nature, isolated efforts. Isolated in two respects: they may not be, in fact or perceived

by the teachers to be, part of a larger ongoing process; and they usually have, again in fact or perceived by the teachers to have, little direct relation to what actually happens in the classroom.

The same can be said for those after-school curriculum projects for some higher authority (usually a State Department of Education). The negative effect of the usual scheduling is too obvious to require further comment.

Those additional university courses, taken on campus or through extension, are fine for the university; they enhance departmental enrollments, thereby helping to justify faculty positions. And those courses are fine for the teachers; they may qualify for higher pay or at least retain certification. The weary teacher may even find intellectual delight and stimulation in such courses, but this delight and stimulation are usually more a personal benefit than professional enhancement.

To be sure, some good has been accomplished in the past through these traditional means. The point is that there surely must be a more effective way to educate teachers. Also, there is no intended criticism here of the guidelines. Rather, if anything is being attacked, it is the slothfulness brought to their observance by the profession.

An effective way to implement these guidelines for both preservice and inservice preparation is to blend the two with a heightened respect for the immediacy of the teacher's role, as it exists rather than as it is supposed to exist. Note, too, that preservice and inservice preparation are to be <u>contiguous</u>: They should really <u>touch</u> each other and not be merely sequential.

Just as the guidelines call for maximizing the work in public schools for preservice education, so should inservice education efforts become

an integral part of the job rather than the tack-on approach of the past. In both cases the need is to focus on the actual job of the teacher.

What I am proposing is simply that people learn from each other while maintaining a common focus. As in any dynamic classroom, the learning is not uni-directional. There are three types of people involved: Preservice teacher-candidates, teacher educators, and practicing professionals. This sounds much like the traditional arrangement of student-teacher, university supervisor, and cooperating teacher; but there are important differences.

One of these differences has been mentioned. The common focus must be the actual job of the teacher. Too frequently in the past the teacher educator's focus has more likely been the job as he remembered it, if indeed he ever was a practicing professional. True, this rememberance has usually been seasoned by shared second-hand experiences from practicing professionals of a more recent vintage. But in any event, the teacher and the educator have not been dealing with the same reality. No matter how similar the two realities may have been, you can be sure that the teacher will never forget that the two realities are not the same and that is reason enough not to accept any well-intentioned theories. The stage is thus set in familiar fashion for the practicing professional to learn or accept little of anything from an outsider, and the teacher-candidate's success is a function of his skill in coping with this dissonance.

The key to improving preservice and inservice preparation is clear: To replace dissonance with harmony. This is a most important change from more traditional arrangements. The movement needs to be from mere tolerance to acceptance and finally to respect. The effectiveness of any program will be directly related to the quality of the relationship as it moves

along this continuum. Since this is a problem in teacher education, teacher educators must take the initiative as it is primarily our concern.

Certainly teacher educators have had more than mere tolerance from teachers in the past, but the acceptance and respect has been largely restricted to matters outside that teacher's high school classroom. There has been respect for scholarliness, but not for the application of that scholarship in that high school classroom. There has been acceptance of prior experience with high school students, but not of knowledge about Rodney Jacobs in this quarter's fourth period class. Unlike Frank McGuire or Adolph Rupp, we have to demonstrate our proficiency in executing a slam-dunk or at least have made the pass to the slam-dunker each season if we are to establish and maintain credibility.

This credibility and the quality relationship go together. The needed mutual trust and respect are products of working together and working beyond surface differences. There is no way that the climate will exist for effective sharing through the simple declaration of humane and lofty intentions.

There must be an honest sharing in decision making, and that can start with decisions about various aspects of preparing beginning teachers--not just which classes the initiate is to try to handle with the teacher's guidance. Some examples are: what work should teacher candidates have had before trying to teach? Which teacher-candidate should the teacher work with? How rapidly should the teacher-candidate proceed in assuming responsibilities?

This sharing in decision making can be a clear demonstration of the teacher educator's acceptance and respect for the teacher. Reciprocity cannot be expected immediately, but it can never be expected until

the initial move has been made. As I said before, teacher educators should take the initiative.

Another demonstration of commitment is of time. In any human relationship, the allocation of time is a sure indicator of attached importance. If the professor stops by only a few times during a term, the message is clear: There are more important matters than these high school classes. Relying primarily on graduate assistants has an even more devastating effect. Simply being there is an essential ingredient.

The desired relationship is that of co-worker, colleague--not of superior/subordinate. It must be remembered that co-workers are present when and where the work is being done. If it seems that too much emphasis is being placed on this relationship, remember that the relationship developed between these two varieties of professionals provides the basis for the most effective inservice program.

Now it must be understood that inservice education is to be a freely operating two-way street. This requirement is as vital to the inservice effort as is the sharing of decision making in working with teacher-candidates. Teachers are making good things happen in their classrooms. It is a simple matter to give positive reinforcement for the best of what happens. All it takes is saying, "The kids were really getting a lot out of that discussion today," or "I don't often see boys like Frank get so interested as he was last period," or "May I make a copy of your materials for that lesson; I'd like a chance to try that myself." Teachers are hungry for such praise; they get far too little of it. I know of no better way to gain acceptance for some of my ideas than to openly accept some of theirs. What is more, I am richer professionally because their ideas really are good. The praise and acceptance offered have to be genuine; you can't fake

it with teachers.

The preservice teacher fits into this scheme, too. The occasional flashes of brilliance of which most teacher-candidate's are capable are not lost on an observing teacher. Many things can be said about teachers, but foremost is that they care, and care deeply, about their students and how their students feel about them. There is not a teacher who does not thirst for student acclaim and respect. Given this, it is hard to imagine teachers not wanting to borrow ideas that they have observed bringing this desired acclaim and respect from their students to someone else--the teacher-candidate.

The teacher educator, of course, has had a direct influence on what the teacher-candidate has done, meaning the teacher-candidate may be a vehicle for ideas between educator and teacher--and vice versa.

Examples abound: My idea files are bulging with plans and materials I have gleaned from continuing relationships with teachers. In the other direction I watched a practicing professional make a dramatic change this year. In September Mrs. Kraft oozed with the "You-come-in-with-all-these-fancy-ideas" attitude. Last month while watching a particularly engaging lesson led by a teacher-candidate, I observed Mrs. Kraft making detailed notes on what was going on; she said that she wanted to try that idea with another one of her classes. My reply? "That sounds like a good idea for them. Let me know how it goes."

There are many refinements that are discovered as you proceed, such as: Pair your stronger teacher-candidates with weaker teachers and vice versa. Also, there are many reasons why you cannot work this closely with teachers, such as: University workload requirements make it difficult to justify this expenditure of a professor's time. Such problems are real

enough, but they are not insurmountable. The choice is there to be made: Either find a way to do a better job or settle for continued mediocrity. I have often contended that good, creative teaching is not easier; it does take more effort. Good ideas do not work by themselves; it takes a strong teacher to make them work.

Successful implementation means an approach that brings success, and the secret of success is no secret. Work, and work together! It can be done.